

8. The next example of faith follows closely from the previous one; the Passover event that secured the liberation of the Hebrews saw them shortly afterward camping near the shore of the Red Sea. And if the Passover episode tested the Hebrews' faith, the incident at the Red Sea did all the more. The latter also very much implicated Moses' faith – indeed, it depended on it, but the Hebrews writer chose to treat this example of faith collectively: “By faith *they* passed through the Red Sea as though through dry land...” (11:29).
- a. Once again the author provided his readers with only a summary statement, trusting their knowledge of the story to give them the background context for grasping his meaning. That story follows the Passover account in the book of Exodus, and several of its particulars are worth noting here.
- 1) The first is the fact that God *Himself* led the Israelites out of Egypt. He didn't communicate directions to Moses, but led His people by His manifest presence, going before them in a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire when they traveled at night (Exodus 13:21-22).
  - 2) The second thing to note is the path Yahweh chose in leading the Hebrews toward the promised land of Canaan. The most direct route from Goshen in Egypt to Canaan was northeast along the Mediterranean coast, but this would take them through the land of the Philistines (the region of modern-day Gaza), and God voiced His concern that the prospect of war with the Philistines would cause the people to turn back to Egypt. Thus He directed them southeast toward the Red Sea and the Sinai desert (13:17-18).
  - 3) The Exodus account gives the impression that the Philistine threat was the sole reason God chose this route, but there were other, more significant factors at play. First and foremost, He had told Moses at their first encounter at Mount Horeb in Sinai that He was going to bring the Israelites back there to “worship Him,” which hinted at His intent to ratify the covenant relationship at that mountain (ref. again Exodus 3:1-12; cf. Exodus 19:1-8). But Yahweh also had in mind another great test of faith and demonstration of power – a work by which He would complete His triumph over Egypt and its gods. The plague of the first-born broke Pharaoh's will, but the judgment at the Red Sea was going to decimate his power and bring his kingdom to its knees.
  - 4) Finally, knowing that Pharaoh had men watching Israel's movement, the Lord led them in a manner that would cause him to believe that they were wandering aimlessly, shut in by the Sinai wilderness. Pharaoh was already regretting his decision to release his slaves, and this circumstance would surely encourage him to send out his army to retrieve them. This is exactly what happened, and Yahweh reinforced Pharaoh's resolve to get the Israelites back (14:1-4). And so, even as Pharaoh was preparing his army, the Lord was leading Israel to camp at a place that would leave them backed up against the sea with no escape (14:5-9).

- b. While Israel was making camp by the sea opposite Baal-Zephon (likely, the Gulf of Suez), Pharaoh was advancing his forces toward them. When the people saw the Egyptian chariots heading toward them, they panicked and began to rail against Moses for leading them to their deaths. Their joy in their liberation evaporated, and the mud pits of Egypt suddenly seemed attractive. But it was *Yahweh* who had led them to this place, so that their anger and disbelief were actually directed toward Him, even as they cried out to Him for help (14:10-13).

Moses responded by rebuking their fear and commanding them to stand fast and wait for the Lord's deliverance; the One who'd brought them out of Egypt with a mighty triumph would not now forsake them on the shore of the sea. Moses charged the people to trust in their God, while also petitioning Him on their behalf (14:13-15). *Yahweh's* response in the narrative ("Why are you crying out to Me?") seems to suggest His displeasure with Moses, but the context indicates that He was simply calling him to action: *Moses, you need to stop pleading with Me and direct the people to move forward toward the sea. And, as for you, lift your staff high with your hand stretched out so that the people can see you, and I will divide the water so that they can pass through the sea on dry ground. Then I will cause the Egyptian army to pursue you onto the seabed, and I will be honored through the judgment I bring against them, such that the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, the faithful God of the hosts of Israel* (14:16-18).

- c. The Lord apparently gave this instruction as the evening was approaching, for after speaking to Moses, He moved the cloud of His presence from in front of the Israelites to the rear of their camp, thereby forming a barrier between them and the Egyptians who were setting up their own camp some distance away. Thus He protected them throughout the night, even as He pushed aside the sea water with a strong east wind while Moses stood with his staff raised. While the Egyptians were held at bay, the Israelites began to advance across the dry seabed, with the cloud of *Yahweh's* presence lighting their way (14:19-22).
- d. So it was by *faith* that the children of Israel went down the bank into the sea, walking toward the eastern side of the gulf with a wall of water on either side (Hebrews 11:29). Only trust in their God could motivate them to take such a huge risk; if the sea were to break loose, they would be instantly drowned. But their faith stood upon Moses' faith – not just because he had led them to this miraculous moment, but because his faith was the instrument *Yahweh* used to provide them their path through the sea.
- e. The Lord restrained the Egyptians throughout the night as the vast multitude of Hebrews slowly made their way across to the other side. But at the right moment He released His restraint and Pharaoh's army took off in pursuit, racing their chariots down onto the seabed. The Israelites were most likely still crossing, which would have emboldened the Egyptians to risk their own lives; they must have attributed this great miracle to the Hebrew God, and He would surely hold back the waters until all of His people were safe on the other side.

But if this assumption is correct, it's hard to imagine that the Egyptian chariots wouldn't overtake the Israelites who were crossing on foot. Many scholars locate the crossing at a place where the Gulf of Suez is about three miles wide, and such a short distance would surely allow the Egyptians to reach the Hebrews while they were still crossing. This, along with the need to have the entire Egyptian force on the seabed, is the likely reason God intervened to frustrate the army's movement and throw them into chaos (14:24-25). Though the Egyptians sensed divine intervention, they were powerless against it. As they frantically scrambled to escape the sea floor, God instructed Moses to again stretch out his hand toward the sea, and the two walls of water collapsed down on them, utterly consuming Egypt's military might – and Pharaoh's glory – in an instant (14:26-28).

Such a spectacular phenomenon must have left the Israelites overwhelmed and speechless, and while they rested and regathered their strength, they watched the now-calm sea begin to deliver its victims onto the shore in front of them. Their faith in Yahweh and Moses His servant had moved them to walk down onto the seabed between two quaking walls of water, and He'd rewarded their faith with an experience of power and protection that filled them with overwhelming awe. If they believed Him before, they were now utterly convinced that this God was indeed the God of their fathers, and He would surely fulfill all that He had promised them.

Thus Moses and all the people raised their voices in song to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, acknowledging and praising Him as the faithful Lord who keeps covenant, whatever may come. Nothing can distract or deter Him, and He wields His invincible power against all enemies and forces arrayed against His purposes and will and the people through whom He carries them out. These glorious truths filled the Israelites' song, which the Scripture immortalized as the *Song of Moses* (Exodus 15:1-21). But just as the triumphal deliverance the song celebrated anticipated a greater one yet to come, so it was with the song itself. The Song of Moses would one day find its own fulfillment in the *Song of the Lamb* (Revelation 15:1-4; cf. 5:1-14, 14:1-3).

God preserved and delivered Abraham's offspring because His covenant with him pledged a particular descendent – a "seed" who would also be the son promised to Eve (ref. Galatians 3:16). The Abrahamic family was Yahweh's beloved covenant "son" (Exodus 4:23), but as it would realize its sonship *in truth* through a particular son to be born into it. Israel was to become Israel *indeed* through the unique Israelite who would fully and faithfully embody Israel's identity and calling as son, disciple, servant and witness on behalf of all the earth's families. This was God's design from the beginning, but it presupposed the *failure* of the Abrahamic household. So also the song celebrating the bond between covenant Father and son carried a tone of foreboding (cf. Moses' other song in Deuteronomy 32), for that bond was but an *ideal* whose realization awaited the son promised to Abraham; in that day, the Song of Moses would find its true substance in the Song of the Lamb. But for now, the covenant son's faith and faithfulness would prove fickle and fleeting. Within days, the voices celebrating Yahweh in worshipful song would become unclean vessels given over to grumbling and accusation (Exodus 16-18).